

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 15A

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER
12 September 1984

CIA denies tie with 'contra' backers

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Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The CIA told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence yesterday that no CIA officers were in contact with any member of an Alabama-based paramilitary organization before two of the group's members were killed Sept. 1 in a helicopter crash in Nicaragua.

The committee was briefed by representatives of the CIA and the Defense Department about the helicopter crash involving the private anti-communist group, Civilian Military Assistance. Afterward, the committee said it was trying to determine whether the U.S. government was officially involved in the incident.

Two members of Civilian Military Assistance, Dana Herbert Parker Jr. of Huntsville, Ala., and James Powell 3d of Memphis, Tenn., were killed when a military helicopter crashed during an operation by CIA-backed rebels, known as *contras*, fighting the Marxist-led government of Nicaragua.

The intelligence committee statement quoted CIA representatives as disclaiming any CIA relationship with Civilian Military Assistance and saying the agency "had no involve-

ment" in the fatal mission.

"CIA officials also stated that they had no advance knowledge of the specific mission, although they were aware of a group of U.S. volunteers subsequently identified as the 'Civilian Military Assistance.' However, no CIA officers were in contact with any member of Civilian Military Assistance prior to the ill-fated mission," the committee said.

The statement said Sen. Barry Goldwater (R., Ariz.), chairman of the committee, admonished members at the outset of the closed meeting not to use it as a forum for attacking the two volunteers who died.

"They both were veterans of the Vietnam War," Goldwater was quoted as saying. "I believe they were men doing what they thought was right. Whether or not they made a good decision here, they have paid for it with their lives, and we should be mindful of that."

Meanwhile, a congressional caucus studying U.S. policies in Central America said American officials may have violated the U.S. Neutrality Act and three other laws in connection with the incident.

The Departments of State, Justice, Defense and the Treasury also are investigating whether any U.S. laws or regulations have been violated.

The congressional caucus consists of 135 House and Senate members, most of them Democrats.

The report on the activities of Civilian Military Assistance was issued as an addendum to a 50-page report analyzing possible violations of law by U.S. officials carrying out the Reagan administration's policies in Central America.

The report said there appeared to be a "far-reaching and inclusive" pattern in which "numerous individual laws have been violated."

Rep. Jim Leach (R., Iowa) the caucus chairman, said, "The United States has escaped major terrorism because we are a law-abiding nation.

If our government fails to abide by the law, it will provide an incentive for others — including terrorists — to follow suit."

The authors of the study said, "This report is concerned with the actions of U.S. policymakers, not private citizens. If, however, U.S. officials were lax in enforcing certain laws, or actually assisted private citizens who were in violation of the law, then those actions become relevant to the report, and especially to congressional debate."

The U.S. Neutrality Act prohibits private support or participation in military expeditions against foreign governments that are at peace with the United States.

"Although the governments of the U.S. and Nicaragua are far from friendly, they do continue to have diplomatic relations, and no declaration of war has been asserted," the report said.

"The apparent failure of U.S. officials to halt the activities of CMA or other groups sending cash and aid to the *contras* adds strength to the case that the Neutrality Act may be being violated."

The caucus said Civilian Military Assistance evidently had failed to obtain necessary export licenses for such items as ammunition clips and camouflage uniforms and may have violated licensing requirements for export of "defense services" by providing military training to the *contras*.

The authors cited reports that a U.S. Army officer in San Salvador served as liaison between the organization and the Salvadoran army. They said the Defense Department and the CIA knew of the organization's activities in the spring and failed to take action.